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CARVED FRUIT STONES

(Special Correspondence of THE COLLECTOR)

Nothing is wasted in China. The stones of various fruits and the shells of nuts are cleaned, dried and carved into ornaments of the most graceful kind. Among the stones used are the olive, plum, peach, lai-chee and cherry; and of the shells the walnut and cocoanut.

The stones are selected with care; each must exceed a certain standard of size, proportion, hardness and weight. They are dried slowly, and at such a heat as not to crack or sprout, and are then ready for the carver.

The designer makes a rough outline of the future group or picture and hands it over to his boys or apprentices. These work with great rapidity and soon block out the design, cutting through the hard ligneous tissue, and then extract the kernel. A second treatment now takes place to dry the interior of the stone, as well as to prevent the fine lining of the interior from undergoing decomposition.

This completed, the designer sketches a second outline and also indicates by his pencil or brush where the surface is to be lowered, fretted, made into leaf-work or arabesquery, or be cut altogether away. The work is performed by the subordinates, as at first. The designer then does the finishing touches, after which the assistants clean, polish and oil or wax the perfected carving.

The stones are sold in this shape to quite a large extent, but more largely in other forms. Among these may be mentioned buttons, watch charms, sleeve links, ear rings, and brooches, and when strung together, bracelets, anklets, necklaces, watch-chains, rosaries, and official ornaments.

The price of a stone varies greatly with the workmanship and the fame of the carver. Some may be bought as low as ten cents apiece; others command as high as two and three dollars each. The average price is thirty cents a stone, with a handsome discount for purchases in quantity.

The carvings display great variety and beauty. One class represents bunches of flowers and leaves, in which pistils, stamens and tendrils are accurately executed. Similar to these are fruits and flowers, and flowers and leaves. A second class is composed of carvings of birds, reptiles, and higher animals. The dragon, griffin, stork, snake, horse, lion, tiger, camel, elephant and bull are the favorite figures. I do not recall ever having seen a cat, dog, wolf, sheep, goat or other animal beyond those specified.

A friendly mandarin, to whom I stated this, said that a canon in Chinese carving was to reproduce only those animals which had been deified, and that the ten mentioned were about the only ones which had enjoyed divine honors.

A third class, and by far the most interesting, comprises groups of human figures representing scenes in history, poetry, mythology and the drama. The workmanship is often so fine as to be microscopic in its delicacy. In fact, the finishing touches are made by the artist while using a magnifying glass of at least fifty diameters. On stones not over an inch in length along their major axis, it is not uncommon to find eight, nine and ten characters in different attitudes and costumes. Unlike most phases of Chinese art, there is much regard paid to perspective and foreshortening. Some of these pieces might have been made by Hindoo or Italian artists, so free are they from local or race conventionalism.

Nevertheless, in the main, conventionalism is all-pervading. Dignity always wears a beard, and low comedy with villainy are disguised with queer markings and quaint attitudes. The horse has a head twice too large, and the dragon carries a tail which in real life would have insured his prompt destruction. Gods wear queues, and goddesses stroll about with compressed feet.

But was there ever a school of art of any sort free from conventionalism? Even were there one, it would probably be as unsatisfactory as the most artificial systems of our own civilization or of this strange and mighty one upon the borders of the Chinese sea.

Amoy, August 15, 1892.

EDWARD BEDLOE.

The Hakluyt Society are about to issue, in two volumes, Pietro della Valle's eight letters from India, edited by Mr. Edwary Grey, late of the Bengal Civil Service. The same society will issue next year, also in two volumes, the voyages of Capt. Luke Foce and Capt. James to Hudson's Bay, edited by Mr. Miller Christy. Mr. Clements Markham, the distinguished president of the society, has lately been staying at Genoa and studying the Columbian record. He has promised to contribute a collection of unpublished early voyages to America—fragments relating to Cabot, Cortereal, Vespucci and Verrazzano. Mr. Delmar Morgan, the genial honorary secretary of the Hakluyt, has in contemplation the publication of an edition of the letters of Peter Martyr d'Anghiera, the chronicler of the great events of the reign of Ferdinand and Isabella. Meanwhile, Dr. Robert Brown's edition of "Leo Africanus" is nearly ready for the printer; and the same may be said of a book on early English voyages to the Levant, with some account of the Levant Company, by Mr. Theodore Bent. Mr. Everard im Thurm, who is now in England on leave of absence from British Guiana, hopes to devote two months of work at Torquay this autumn to his edition of Schomburgk's very admirable volume of Sir Walter Raleigh's "Empire of Guiana."

CHINESE LITTLE DEVILS

(Special Correspondence of THE COLLECTOR)

AN odd art industry in this province is the making of tiny images, which are variously known as "figuresses" or "little devils." They are statuettes ranging from a half-inch to three inches in length, and are moulded from a paste whose composition is a trade secret. It would be better to use the plural than the singular, for each community of modelers uses a paste different from that of the others. Among the ingredients employed are hard wax, insect wax, glue, vegetable gum, linseed gum, papier maché, burned umber, sepia, kaolin, ultramarine, yellow ochre, chrome yellow, vermilion, white of egg and pulverized egg shells. Rather a wide field to choose from. The backbone of the figure is a stick of hard, dry wood, left rough to give a better purchase to the paste. Upon this are moulded the head, torso and one leg. The other leg and the arms are stiffened by wires or thin pieces of wood. The coarse work is done by boys, girls, women or apprentices, who are remarkably quick and skilful. They use their fingers in outlining and a variety of little wooden tools, in producing textures, hair, beards and weapons. The figures are then handed over to the artists, who are always men. They finish the features, give an expression to the face and remedy any defect or mistake of their subordinates. The figures are then carefully dried. According to the composition of the paste, this is done in a warm room, cool current of air, a kiln or the open sunlight. The best kinds are dried in a warm room and require from three to eight weeks before they are thoroughly done.

The figuresses are divided into two classes, toys and art objects. The former are built upon long sticks, like "jumpy jacks." The wired arms are jointed loosely to the body, so that when the stick is whirled, they gyrate in a very amusing manner. The workmanship is coarse and the cost a mere trifle, ranging from 1 cent to 2 a figure, or from 10 to 20 a dozen.

The other kind are built upon short sticks, which are fastened into small wooden platforms so as to stand upright. Their workmanship varies, some being rude and clumsy and others very fine. Their variety is infinite. One set of 100 represents all the characters in a great classic drama. Another set of the same number embodies the various types in the armies of a heroic Chinese king and a savage monarch whom he has conquered. A third consists of 200 figures of the various vocations of daily life. Other sets are those of distinguished generals, famous kings, heroic queens, poets, lawgivers, engineers and admirals. The leading artist in this quaint industry claims to carry 5,000 separate faces in his memory and to be able to reproduce anyone in paste at the word.

The figuresses are made in color or monochrome. When colors are employed the greatest care is bestowed upon the correct tinting of details. The crown is gilt, the bracelet silvered, the coats, undercoats and trousers colored according to the style and age to which they belong. The historic accuracy in many cases is admirable. On the other hand, the modeling of colored figures is usually mediocre or worse. The features are poorly outlined and the fingers, weapons and ornaments indicated rather than moulded.

In monochrome the reverse is the case. The paste is dark red, brown or brown-black, and every detail is wrought out with the greatest care. On a figure an inch in height, the eyelids, ear ring holes and finger-nails, are often so well executed as to bear scrutiny with a strong magnifying glass. As might be supposed, the cost of this class is higher than that of the other and runs from 3 to 6 cents a figure, or from 30 to 60 cents a dozen. How the artist manages to live upon these rates is a profound mystery. These Chinese have a happy knack of displaying all kinds of figuresses by placing them in miniature theatres, temples or pleasure-grounds. A glass box 8 x 10 x 5 inches containing diminutive trees, rocks and 25 figures can be purchased for a dollar. Next to a trip through China, nothing can give a better notion of the endless variety and brilliancy of costume than a set of 200 figuresses or "little devils."

Amoy, August 12, 1892.

WILLIAM E. S. FALES.

The *Times*, of Bethlehem, Pa., reports the discovery, in a piece of red sandstone found at a quarry in Milford, in that State, of the impressions of a tridactyl foot either of a bird or reptile of the Mesozoic age.

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At the recent sale of the famous Hulot collection in Paris, a "superb example" of Rembrandt's 100 guilder piece, "Christ Healing the Sick," in the second state (the first state of Bartsch), on Japanese paper with margin, from the Aylesford, Hawkins and Didot collections, brought 6,100 francs, and another, similar to it, but described as "very fine" instead of "superb," brought 905 francs. A "Good Samaritan," "very rare, a superb example of the first state, the horse having a white tail and the wall of the perron being also white," brought 1,020 francs, and a "superb proof" of the "Rembrandt aux Trois Moustaches," from the Didot collection, went for 410 francs. Scores and scores of Rembrandt etchings were sold, but an idea of the run of prices may be gathered from these few quotations. The entire sale of prints netted 110,700 francs, and the highest price paid for a single article seems to have been 13,900 francs. But this was given, not for a single print, but for the four superb volumes of plates and text in which M. de Julienne reproduced the works of Antoine Watteau.